

Alternatives Considered in Detail
Description of Alternatives; Alternative C

objective of this road maintenance is to help suppression crews keep fires smaller. This would benefit the wildlife habitat and soil erosion situation greatly.

For Alternative C, roads would be maintained in Fire Ecology Zones 1, 2, and 3. These areas have a high potential for frequent burns. Improved access and fuel breaks in these areas would help fire suppression efforts greatly.

Although other management practices to reduce wildfire size and occurrence are not proposed for Alternative C, they could be considered in the future as availability and effectiveness are demonstrated. Such practices might include seeding of fire resistant plant species in strips. The environmental effects of any such practices would be considered in the NEPA process before the practices could be implemented.

Wildlife Habitat. Several wildlife habitat objectives have been covered under the discussion of multiple use areas for Alternative C. Habitat objectives for the hybrid trout are covered under L6-Vineyard Creek ACEC; for the Shoshone sculpin, they are covered under L7-Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs ACEC; for the Bliss Rapids snail, they are covered under both L6 and L7; for ring-necked pheasant and gray partridge (upland game birds), they are covered under L11-Isolated Tracts. The discussion in Fire Management above specifies actions that would benefit wildlife. Following is a discussion of other wildlife habitat objectives for Alternative C.

Brush areas valuable to wildlife would be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan. Specific areas of importance would be identified in detailed examinations and development of HMPs discussed below. Guidelines for fire suppression would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan. Protection of brush pockets would be important in maintaining or enhancing habitat for sage grouse, pronghorn, mule deer, and non-game wildlife. It should be noted that areas of brush valuable to wildlife would likely change over time as some brush stands are burned by wildfire while others recover.

Artificial nest structures would be constructed for the ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, and burrowing owl to increase populations. Specific numbers and locations of these structures would be determined in detailed examination of habitat suitable for each species. Ferruginous hawk nest structures would be placed in remote areas. Swainson's hawk nest structures would be placed on Isolated Tracts (L11). Burrowing owl nest boxes would be placed primarily on Isolated Tracts, but also throughout the breeding range.

A Sage Grouse HMP would be prepared to guide management in the sage grouse winter habitat area covering about 67,000 acres (see Map 7). Objectives of this HMP would be to maintain and enhance sage grouse habitat by maintaining adequate, suitable areas of brush and providing additional forbs for brood rearing. Suitable forbs would be included in range seedings in this area. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

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A Pronghorn Winter Range HMP would be prepared for approximately 171,000 acres shown on Map 15. Objectives of this HMP would be to improve winter habitat for pronghorn by protecting valuable brush stands and increasing the brush component of the areas. Detailed examination would be required to determine the specific areas most important to the wintering animals. The possibility of seeding brush or fire resistant plant species would be examined for feasibility. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

A Pronghorn Summer Range HMP would be prepared for 60,000 acres in the Wildhorse Allotment (see Map 9). Objectives of this HMP would be to improve summer habitat for pronghorn by maintaining adequate areas of brush, providing additional forbs, and providing new water sources. Suitable forbs would be included in range seedings in this area. Guidelines for providing additional water sources would be developed. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

Livestock Forage. Provide 142,879 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 858,043 acres of public land would be included in grazing allotments (see Maps 1 and 9). Average stocking rate would be 6.0 acres per AUM.

The objectives for Alternative C would be to maintain existing perennial forage plants, maintain soil stability, stabilize areas currently in downward trend, and increase availability of perennial forage plants.

The following range improvements would be accomplished in support of achieving the objectives stated above.

25,500 acres of reseeding
19,000 acres of brush control
54 miles of fencing
74 miles of pipeline
110 water troughs
9 wells
24 cattleguards
4 miles of road construction

Total cost of improvements = \$1,602,800

20-year maintenance and replacement cost = \$669,200

In Alternative C, preference levels were adjusted as follows.

1. Allotments with upward trend in all pastures were given an increase.
2. Allotments with static trend pastures were given an increase if reasonable improvements to support the increase can be made.
3. Allotments with downward trend in all pastures were not given increases since range improvements might be necessary just to support current actual use levels. If improvements to support current actual use levels would not be reasonable, allotments with downward trend in all pastures were given a decrease.

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Increases could be up to full preference or beyond depending on trend, actual use, and feasibility of range improvements. Proposed increases would be partially carried by range improvements in some allotments, by existing forage production and facilities in others. No grazing preference was proposed on lands in a transfer category or on Isolated Tracts that are or would be fenced to exclude livestock. A more detailed discussion of the methodology used in determining the stocking level for Alternative C is contained in Appendix D under "Determining the Proposed Stocking Rate."

The grazing preference level proposed for Alternative C is somewhat lower than in Alternative B. It was tempered by an estimation of how many range improvements can be accomplished with future funding levels that can reasonably be expected. Only improvements likely to yield a benefit/cost ratio greater than one were included. The potential productivity of the land was more closely considered.

The proposed stocking level of 142,879 AUMs is 46 percent higher than the current five-year average actual use and is 4 percent less than the current active preference, but it would be supported on 5 percent less land. There are several reasons why this stocking level was chosen.

- No significant conflicts with other resources were identified at this stocking level.
- The methodology used to determine the proposed stocking level indicates that the objectives for livestock forage can be met at this stocking level with the range improvements listed above.
- Although the current rate of 34 percent nonuse may continue into the future, the exact rate of nonuse is unpredictable. Actual use is tied to market conditions and other factors, such as weather. Thus, if Alternative C were implemented, the proposed stocking level of 142,879 AUMs may or may not be fully utilized. The full stocking level of 142,879 AUMs is used for analysis of the environmental effects in the event it were fully utilized.
- The proposed stocking level of 142,879 AUMs for Alternative C could not be supported in a drought year when forage production from annual plant species is low. This would be handled by temporary suspension.

The initial stocking level for Alternative C would be 149,135 AUMs (present active preference). Adjustments toward the proposed preference, 142,879 AUMs, would occur based on monitoring data as discussed under Implementation in Appendix D. Increases dependent on range improvements would occur only as funding for the necessary improvements is available and the projects are completed. Range improvement guidelines are included in Appendix D. Decreases resulting from land transfers would occur only as the identified tracts are transferred from Federal ownership.

No changes in season of livestock use are proposed in Alternative C. This is because no resource conflicts were identified that would be resolved by such changes. However, changes in season of livestock use could be made in the future after considering environmental effects in the NEPA process if supported by monitoring.

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New AMPs or CRMPs would be developed for nine allotments. This would bring the total area covered to 97 percent of the allotted acres.

In Alternative C, it is assumed that 21,910 sheep AUMs would be converted to cattle AUMs. Actual conversion would be consistent with the Shoshone District Conversion Policy. The assumed conversion is based on the same assumptions as described for Alternative B.

Cultural Resources. In addition to the Cultural Resource Management Plans discussed for Devil's Corral (L9a) and the Cedar Fields SRMA (L10), two other plans would be prepared; one for the Oregon Trail and one for Wilson Butte Cave. These plans would specify the degree of protection and the interpretation measures appropriate for the areas. In the case of the Oregon Trail, fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

Soils. Several actions have been discussed which would help meet the objective of keeping soil erosion within tolerable levels. ORV use would be restricted in portions of the Snake River Rim SRMA (L9) and in the Cedar Fields SRMA to protect fragile soils. Fires would be given full suppression when the burning index is above 22 to help protect soils. Road maintenance would be conducted in key areas to help keep fires smaller, thus helping to protect soils. *Fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance would be developed for the Cedar Fields SRMA.*

In addition to the actions listed above, areas with severe erosion problems would be stabilized. At the present time, 150 acres of active sand dunes in the Lake Walcott area have been identified for a seeding project to stabilize the dunes. Other areas would be treated as they are identified, provided treatment would be feasible.

Priority would be given to emergency treatment of severe erosion areas caused by wildfire.

Summary of Activity Plans Required for Implementation of Alternative C.

Two Wilderness Management Plans (excluding Great Rift)
- One for each WSA recommended suitable.

One ORV Designation Implementation Plan
- Detailing how the ORV designations for the planning area would be implemented including public awareness, signing, and enforcement.

Three ACEC Management Plans
- One for each ACEC.

Three Recreation Activity Management Plans (RAMPs)
- One for each special recreation management area (SRMA)

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Four Habitat Management Plans (HMPs)

- One would be a revision of the Isolated Tracts HMP.
- The others would be prepared for pronghorn winter range, pronghorn summer range, and sage grouse winter habitat.

Four Cultural Resource Management Plans

- One each for Devil's Corral, Cedar Fields, Wilson Butte Cave, and the Oregon Trail.

One Cave Management Plan

- For the L12 areas (Areas of Geologic Interest).

Nine AMPs, CRMPs, or other appropriate plans

- One for each of the nine allotments specified in Appendix D.

One Limited Fire Suppression Plan

The fire management plan will include guidelines to

- limit surface disturbance in WSAs recommended suitable, Cedar Fields SRMA, the Oregon Trail, and Areas of Geologic Interest.
- protect vegetation valuable to wildlife on Isolated Tracts, Pronghorn Winter Range HMP area, and brush protection areas.
- protect the naturalness and scenic quality of Vineyard Creek ACEC and Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs ACEC.
- protect the natural vegetation communities of the Substation Tract ACEC.

Some of the activity plans listed above may be consolidated into a single plan where two or more activities have activity plan needs in the same general area.

Alternative D

Goals. In this alternative, protection of fragile resources and wildlife habitat, preservation of natural systems and cultural values, and nonconsumptive resource uses would be favored. Management direction would favor habitat management to increase wildlife populations, protection of cultural resources, protection of wilderness qualities, and opportunities for general dispersed recreation.

Multiple Use and Transfer Areas in Alternative D. Map 5 shows the multiple use and transfer areas for Alternative D.

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M1-Moderate Use. 788,756 acres. No special limitations or restrictions on the type or intensity of resource use would be applied in this area. Valid uses would be allowed subject to environmental review and stipulations or special conditions to protect resources. This area would be open to ORV use.

L1-WSA Recommended Suitable. 154,015 acres. These areas would be recommended suitable for designation by Congress as a part of the Wilderness Preservation System. This includes all six WSAs in the planning area.

All of the WSAs would be recommended suitable in Alternative D, because they are all considered to be manageable as wilderness. Protection of wilderness qualities is favored by the goals of Alternative D.

If designated wilderness by Congress, the areas would be closed to ORV use. New mining claims would be prohibited. Mineral leasing would not be prohibited by wilderness designation, but wilderness character would be considered in making mineral leasing decisions. Land uses would be restricted to those compatible with BLM's Wilderness Management Policy. Utility developments would be effectively prohibited. A wilderness management plan would be prepared for each WSA designated. The wilderness management plan would include fire suppression guidelines designed to protect or enhance wilderness character.

If not designated wilderness by Congress, the areas would generally be managed as M1 areas as described above. The exception is 3,783 acres of areas of geologic interest within the Raven's Eye, Sand Butte, and Bear Den Butte WSAs which would be managed as L12 areas as described below. *Sand Butte (the volcanic cone, not the entire WSA) would be closed to ORV use to protect its naturalness (approximately 220 acres).* No other special designations or developments would be proposed. The other restrictions on ORVs, minerals, land uses, and fire described above would not apply.

L3-Sand Butte ORV Closure. 1,751 acres. This area would be managed as described for M1 areas except that it would be closed to ORV use. The reason for the ORV closure is the same as described for L3 in Alternative C. If the Sand Butte WSA is not designated wilderness by Congress, this area would no longer be closed to ORV use.

L4-ACEC-Substation Tract Relict Vegetation Area. 440 acres. This area would be designated an ACEC to focus management attention on special values as described for L4 in Alternative C. ORV use would be limited to designated roads and trails. No surface occupancy associated with mineral lease development would be allowed. *Livestock grazing would be prohibited.*

An activity plan would be prepared to guide management and protection of the relict vegetation community, especially protection from fire.

The area would be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan and would be under full fire suppression.

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L5-ACEC-Silver Sage Playa Relict Vegetation Area. 10 acres. This area would be designated an ACEC to focus management attention on special values. The area contains a vegetation community uncommon in the Shoshone District. The vegetation community is in as good condition as any similar community in the District and could be valuable for research and reference. Desert Land Entry applications have been filed on this area.

Management to protect the relict vegetation community would entail retention in Federal ownership and aggressive fire control efforts. Fire suppression guidelines would be developed for the area. The area would be closed to ORV use to protect the vegetation. No surface occupancy associated with mineral lease development would be allowed. *Livestock grazing would be prohibited to protect the vegetation.*

An activity plan would be prepared to guide management and protection of the relict vegetation community, especially protection from fire.

The area would be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan and would be under full fire suppression.

L6-ACEC-Vineyard Creek Natural Area. 105 acres. This area would be designated an ACEC to focus management attention on special values as described for L6 in Alternative C. The area would be closed to ORV use. No surface occupancy associated with mineral lease development would be allowed. Mineral material sales would be prohibited.

An activity plan would be prepared to guide management of the unique resources of the area. This plan would specify measures to reduce sedimentation of Vineyard Creek.

L7-ACEC-Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs Sensitive Area. 128 acres. This area would be designated an ACEC to focus management attention on special values as described for L7 in Alternative B. No surface occupancy associated with mineral lease development would be allowed. The area would be open to ORV use.

An activity plan would be prepared to guide management of the unique resources of the area. This plan would include provisions to protect habitat for the Shoshone sculpin and the Bliss Rapids snail.

L8-Little Wood River SRMA. 3,061 acres. The riparian habitat and fishery of this area would be maintained or improved to support quality sport fishing opportunities as described for L8 in Alternative B.

In Alternative D, 274 acres have been added to L8 as compared to Alternative B. The additional area is separated from the rest by private land, but was included in Alternative D since wildlife habitat enhancement and opportunities for general dispersed recreation are favored in Alternative D.

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A recreation activity management plan would be prepared for the area. The area would be open to ORV use.

L9-Snake River Rim SRMA. 15,617 acres. This area would be managed to provide for a wide variety of recreation activities including rifle shooting, archery, motorcycle riding/racing, picnicking, sightseeing, and float boating while resolving conflicts among various uses and protecting cultural resources and fragile soils. The demand for these activities is expected to increase as is the potential for user conflicts.

Sub-area L9a, 345 acres in Devil's Corral, would be closed to ORV use to protect cultural resources and soils. ORV use would be limited to designated roads and trails to protect soils in sub-area L9b, 354 acres. The remaining 14,918 acres would be open to ORV use.

Sub-areas L9a, L9b, and L9d, totalling 1,159 acres, lie within the proposed Dry Cataracts National Natural Landmark. Geologic formations associated with the Bonneville Flood, including alluvial gravel deposits, would be protected from human disturbances that would degrade their naturalness. Mineral material sales and free use would be prohibited.

Sub-area L9c, 819 acres, would be managed as described for L12, Areas of Geologic Interest.

Sub-area L9e, 534 acres, would be managed for protection, maintenance, and enhancement of wildlife habitat. These tracts are included in the existing Isolated Tracts HMP and would be covered by the revised HMP prepared for L11 areas in Alternative D.

Livestock grazing would not be restricted by recreation oriented management in L9.

The existing Snake River Rim Recreation Area Management Plan would be revised to reflect changes from existing ORV designations, acreage within the Snake River Rim SRMA, transfer area designations, float boating management, protection of geologic formations associated with the Bonneville Flood in sub-areas L9a, L9b, and L9d, wildlife management on sub-area L9e, and management of cave resources in sub-area L9c.

A cultural resource management plan would be prepared for Devil's Corral (L9a). This plan would specify the degree of protection and the interpretive measures appropriate for the areas. Fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

L10-Cedar Fields SRMA. 2,240 acres. This area would be managed to provide a variety of recreation activities including ORV use, sport fishing, and river floating; to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat; and to protect scenic quality, fragile soils, and cultural resources.

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ORV use would be limited to protect scenic areas, fragile soils, wildlife values, and cultural resources. ORV restrictions would be applied wherever damage to these resources is occurring or is expected to occur. Livestock grazing would not be restricted by recreation oriented management in the area.

The area would be withdrawn from mineral entry and leasing to protect scenic, cultural, and wildlife values, and to ensure that public access to the Snake River is preserved.

A recreation activity management plan and a cultural resources management plan specifying the degree of protection and interpretive measures appropriate for the area would be prepared for the area. This would include fire suppression guidelines designed to protect fragile soils and cultural resources by limiting surface disturbance.

L11-Isolated Tracts. 14,884 acres. These tracts would be managed for protection, maintenance, and enhancement of wildlife habitat, primarily for upland game birds. In Alternative D, these are all existing and potential Isolated Tracts of medium or high value. Low value existing and potential Isolated Tracts are also generally included with the following exceptions.

1. Low value existing or potential Isolated Tracts were placed in a transfer category if a non-Bureau disposal proposal or agricultural entry application has been made on the tract and no other multiple use value warranted retention of the parcel.
2. Some low value potential Isolated Tracts covering large areas in the Lake Walcott area were identified as potential Isolated Tracts only in response to agricultural entry applications. Since these applications were not placed in a transfer category in Alternative D, the low value potential Isolated Tracts were not included in L11.

The existing Isolated Tracts HMP would be revised to reflect changes in the number of tracts. Sub-area L9e, described earlier in Alternative C, would be covered by the revised HMP. The modified HMP would include fire suppression guidelines to give some priority to protection of wildlife habitat on Isolated Tracts.

These areas would remain open to ORV use. Future ORV restrictions could occur on a case-by-case basis if necessary to protect wildlife or wildlife habitat.

Livestock would be excluded from 821 acres of Isolated Tracts by fencing.

The areas would be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan and would be under full suppression.

L12-Areas of Geologic Interest. 13,578 acres. These areas would be managed to preserve fragile geologic formations associated with caves. These are